

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~ACTION

August 3, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

Phil Odeen *PO*

SUBJECT:

Assessment of the Air War in the North

Your comments on my memo of July 26 (Tab C) asked for memos to get the agencies working quickly on assessment of the air campaign.

At Tab A is a memo to Secretary Laird asking a series of questions on our bombing strategy and options for changing it and the degree of our effort.

At Tab B is a memo for Helms asking for a comprehensive assessment of the effects in the North and suggesting specific approaches and material to be included in the analysis.

You asked about the status of the CIA study on how Hanoi views our campaign in its decision making. I understand Carver is facing serious problems getting internal CIA agreement. A nudge from you at the WSAG might help break it loose.

RECOMMENDATION

That you sign the memos at Tab A and Tab B.

John
John Holdridge and Dick Kennedy concur. *DK*

OSD, NSS review
completed.

~~TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

July 26, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

Phil Odean *BO*

SUBJECT:

Assessment of the Effects of the
Air War on North Vietnam

This memo reviews (1) what has been done to assess the effects of the air campaign in the North, (2) the problems with the assessments, (3) the initial conclusions we draw from the studies, and (4) what needs to be done to get a more adequate intelligence picture to help you and the President address the policy issues. The memo is based on CIA reports (most recent at Tab A), DIA assessments (most recent at Tab B) and periodic reports sent to the President by Secretary Laird (most recent at Tab C) as well as on discussions with CIA and DIA analysts.

What Has Been Done

Both CIA and DIA provide a good summary of the physical damage:

- virtually no sea imports,
- 70% of the electric power generation capacity out,
- most rail lines cut,
- several modern industries such as cement closed down,
- POL supplies reduced to about six weeks "normal" consumption.

In addition CIA has prepared the special study assessing the effects of reducing imports from the 2.5 million tons in 1971 to an annual rate of one million tons (an average of 2700 tons a day). This reduced import level would be approximately the level of the mid-1960s. The CIA study is not an assessment of what Hanoi will in fact import but is a first effort to estimate the minimum essential annual import requirement.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

2

CIA concludes that this level of imports would permit NVN to continue the main force war with periodic highs (the level of June not April) and at the same time maintain domestic order in the North. But this is an annual level and does not mean the North would face disastrous problems if imports fall below 2700 tons a day for a few months.

Problems with the Assessments

The studies are seriously deficient in laying out where, to what extent and when the bombing and mining will disrupt the North. Some of the particular problems with the approach taken in the analysis are:

-- Timing. Thus far we have assessments only of what the physical situation is now and what it will be over a full year. We need a more refined analysis of where the North will be hurt when. What will be the principal problems in August, in October, in January? How will these change? Where will the North be able to take compensating actions to ameliorate problems over time? Where do problems get greater as time goes on?

-- Economic Analysis. The economic studies are too aggregative; they do not examine the problems in particular sectors. For example, fertilizer imports have been greatly expanded in the past few years because of the use of new types of rice. Yet fertilizer is not included in CIA's minimal essential import level. How and when will lack of fertilizer reduce food production? Will farmers have to switch back from new to traditional rice? What other agricultural inputs are critical? Nor is there an examination of the implications of the reduction in power supply. Will agricultural pumping be curtailed causing flooding or limiting irrigation (DIA informally says no, but we would like to see the analysis). How much does the power shortage curtail industry making bombing superfluous?

-- Feel for the Situation. The details have not been provided to give the reader a comprehensive feel for the situation. For example, the studies do not indicate how urban sectors are affected in comparison with rural areas. The CIA study says the fish catch will be reduced by 25 percent. But it does not point out that this is the catch of the bigger sea-going boats that supply Hanoi and Haiphong and thus the remaining urban population will have little fresh fish and will have to do without this most important protein source or imported dried fish will have to be arranged.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

3

-- Import Denial and Destruction. The studies do not differentiate clearly between the effects of import denial and of bomb destruction and disruption.

There are also major substantive shortcomings in the work which has been done:

-- Stocks. An assessment of the North's stock position is obviously critical for short-term projections, yet we know very little about this. The raw intelligence on stocks is limited, but some analysis should be possible by looking at recent import information and the cargos known to be available from the 26 ships remaining in the harbors.

-- Current Imports. How much and what is coming across the Chinese border is obviously critical to any assessment, but we do not yet have a systematic assessment of volume or composition. (Some CIA analysts believe as much as 4000 tons a day is being imported in July on the basis of freight car arrivals at the Chinese border.)

-- Import Levels Below the Essential Minimum. Neither CIA nor DIA has told us what happens if imports drop below the estimated minimal levels. Nor have they discussed the nature and extent of problems that would be caused by particular shortages. For example, how would a serious POL shortage affect the economy?

-- Manpower. There is no comprehensive analysis of the manpower situation although the repair of bomb damage, movement by road instead of rail, dispersal of operations, etc. will require major additional manpower on top of the heavy draft calls of recent years. Informally the analysts have told us they do not believe the manpower restraint will be critical because of the large numbers of people still engaged in agriculture. But this overlooks problems caused by shortages of management personnel or manpower shortages in some geographic areas. Moreover, more not less manpower may be needed to increase agricultural production to offset reduced imports. There is evidence of at least some manpower shortages even before the bombing. Why else was the dike repair not completed? Why the stringent manpower decree just issued?

-- Battlefield Support. The studies do not analyze in detail what items the economy of the North supplies to the battlefield other than to

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

4

say not much. Will the bombing reduce the supply of uniforms and other personnel equipment? Medicines? How about truck and tank repair? We have hit a number of these facilities.

-- Effects on Leadership. Because there is not a comprehensive picture of the many problems for the North, there is no assessment of how the leadership may view these problems. A comparison of effects of the current campaign with the 1965-68 campaign, a key element for judgement on the degree of pressure on the leadership has not been done. The use of smart bombs which has allowed us to inflict damage much more quickly must affect the leadership's assessment of the situation and the future. What kinds of decisions must the leadership face, and when? What trade-offs must they make?

Our Initial Assessment

Making allowance for the many problems with the analysis noted above, my assessment of the current situation follows. It focuses on the impact today, since I believe more work must be done before I will have much confidence in assessment of the situation in September-October or early next year.

Level of Effort. The level of our air effort is well below that of the late 1960's. About 6000 attack sorties a month were flown during May and June, about half the level during 1967 and 1968. However, because of the use of smart bombs, we have inflicted heavy damage rapidly - at a pace probably three times that of the earlier period. We have had more B-52 sorties in the North, but with a few exceptions these have been concentrated against staging areas just north of the DMZ.

Impact. It is too soon for the impact of import denial to be widely felt.

-- Current Military Situation in the South. Most of the supplies for the current offensive were prepositioned, with the possible exception of northern MR-1. Even here supplies were probably just north of the DMZ. We know from captured documents that the target military supply level for stocks both in the north and forward areas is 21 months. It is doubtful that stocks of many items were close to this level, especially at recent consumption rates. But there is no evidence that import denial for a few months has created shortages of military supplies. (Our bombing in the battlefield and supply areas just north of the DMZ, however, appears to be causing serious distribution problems on the battlefields for various items including rice.)

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

5

-- Future Military Situation. The lack of data on stocks makes it very hard to forecast the impact of the campaign on NVA/VC actions in the south. But, there seems little doubt that if the blockade and bombing continue for some months, a major NVA effort next dry season is out of the question. In part it will be the direct effect of limits on the import of new weapons, ammo and supplies. But the impact on the North's planning will also be a factor. A major offensive will take considerable advance planning and preparation - actions that must start soon. Given the uncertainty about the supply situation, planning a major effort seems improbable. But we can expect continued military pressure, more on the scale of the protracted war with high points experienced from 1969 through 1971.

-- Civilian Supplies. Again it is too early to see major supply shortages. The cargos on the ships in harbor are about all that would have been unloaded in May and early June anyway. Any country depending on as long a supplyline as Vietnam must maintain substantial stocks. Moreover, we do not know how much has been coming in by road from China. CIA analysts "guess" about 4000 tons per day and DIA does not dispute this. The area most likely to be critical is POL where stocks are estimated to be down to about six weeks. But the pipeline appears to be working, and stocks of some types of POL may now have leveled off or are rising. Supplies of some civilian items will become short during the next couple of months. The regime will shortly have to cut the food ration and limit consumption of other consumer goods in some way, unless it is prepared to exhaust all stocks or overland supply increases sharply.

Manpower. There are increasing indications of a manpower shortage. Dispersal of population and some production has made efficient use of manpower more difficult. Great effort is being given to maximizing agricultural production which is labor intensive. At the same time additional labor is required to repair damage to the LOCs and to operate the dispersed transportation system. The continued heavy draft has reduced the number of able-bodied men available (large numbers of older (25-30) men and university students were drafted during the past nine months). The recent manpower decree indicates serious concern about the manpower situation.

The Economy. The effect on the economy is uneven.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

6

-- Agriculture has thus far hardly been affected. It depends on few inputs. It is not mechanized. Fertilizer shortages will not affect the current crop but may have a substantial effect on harvests in 1973. Principal concerns are to increase production to substitute for imports, and to repair and strengthen the dike system. We have done very little damage to the dikes and there is little that can be done quickly to increase agricultural production.

-- Modern Industry has been virtually halted by reduction in power and the physical damage to the relatively few major plants. Physical damage will take months to repair even if needed parts were imported promptly. Because of the loss of production in this sector, GNP is down 15 to 20 percent. The industrial expansion program to which Hanoi has given high priority since 1968 is virtually halted (many foreign technicians have already departed).

-- Power production has been greatly reduced. Power is rationed and a number of industries dependent on electricity have stopped operating.

-- Transportation. A greatly increased effort is needed to move a smaller volume of goods. Frictional losses have been increased substantially. Road transportation is less efficient and more manpower intensive than water and rail. Disruption has undoubtedly forced the regime to allocate a large portion of its management talent to overcoming transportation problems.

-- Government Administration. We have little hard information on the extent of disruption in government. Some schools appear to have been closed. The lessons learned in Rolling Thunder have probably helped the government adjust fairly rapidly to the new situation. However, we have seen numerous reports of dissatisfaction in the population with required evacuation of cities. Certainly the party apparatus is strained to overcome the many new management problems while at the same time assuring population control.

Policy Questions

The utility of better assessments is not only to improve your understanding of the situation but also to provide the basis for considering policy questions, such as:

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

7

-- How and where can we intensify the pressure?

-- Are we getting the maximum effect from each sortie?

-- Should we concentrate on interdicting the roads from China and the pipeline? On truck maintenance facilities? On some other element?

I am not familiar with our bombing strategy nor with how it is coordinated among the JCS, Navy, MACV, CINCPAC and 7th Air Force. The intelligence does not indicate a single focus on a critical target system. Perhaps we should be asking if there is a greater payoff by concentrating on the LOCs, on disrupting the economy, on the government (communications, administrative offices), or on military facilities such as training bases?

CIA concluded years ago that there is no target system whose destruction would cripple the North. They may be right. But only a small amount of resources is necessary to analyze this again considering technology advances. If the conclusion is that half or two-thirds of our air effort is having only a marginal effect on the North, you and the President should know this.

How to Proceed

There are a number of ways we can proceed to tap the resources of the intelligence community to get answers to the questions raised above and to give you a better picture of what our mining and bombing are accomplishing.

-- We could give CIA a careful list of questions and have them rework and improve their studies.

-- We could ask an existing intelligence community group (e.g., the USIB) to prepare an assessment based on our questions and guidance.

-- We could establish a working group under the WSAG (or VSSG) including representatives of all the intelligence agencies (CIA, DIA, NSA) and probably JCS to pull together the best possible assessment under our direction (identifying differences in assessments among agencies).

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE

8

In my view, the third alternative is most likely to provide assessments that are responsive to your interests. NSC leadership will force the various agencies to confront each other and justify their conclusions and methods without making us overdependent on any single agency, all of which seem to have one bone or another to pick. It will, of course, take considerable time of my staff and NSC involvement won't be universally appreciated.

RECOMMENDATION

I recommend that you establish a temporary subgroup on intelligence at the next Vietnam WSAG and direct the agencies to designate their members. Andy Marshall agrees with this approach.

John Holdridge and T. C. Pinckney *top* concur with the thrust of this paper although they believe establishment of an NSC mechanism may be unnecessary and we should simply keep throwing these questions back at the intelligence agencies until we are satisfied with their answers. They recommend that we request a SNIE on the questions which would be a joint product of the community.

TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE